*Trans***Posed**

Visualising *social, cultural and aesthetic*
dichotomies through a transgendered lens

'Attention' – 4-week project documentation notes

Interesting points of note from previous artist talks/lectures:
Christo – drawing attention to what's already there by simultaneously hiding and revealing aspects of the world to us.
Louise Bourgoise – drawing attention to feminist & other issues usually ignored by the art world
Mapplethorpe – processes depicting those marginalised by the art world
Lucien Freud – bringing the body back into art by using non-professional models
Alys – 'making something leads to nothing' (cf the pushed ice block through the street)
Hannah Hoch – photomontage
Douglas Gordon's photo self-portraits as Warhol as a crossdresser, Kurt Cobain, etc
Gavin Turk as dead Ché and Sid Vicious
Portrait of Eva Hess – focusing on the concept of 'wrap' (→ the things we wrap ourselves in – e.g clothes, outward identities, facades and faces we present to the public).
→ Links back to my original notes taken for the Poor Art project – the issue of transgender identities and public personae.

Notes for that project:
'Proof of life' – proof of me/of my other half? What is proof? A photo? But the photo may be a lie, depicting a 'wrap', a cover-up, make-up, non-standard dress, as in the above self-portraits as other people. Therefore the assumption that Trans people are 'pretending' to be something else that they're not – when in fact they're presenting to the world what they truly are, or feel to be, inside. Like Christo - "drawing attention to what's already there by simultaneously hiding and revealing aspects" of themselves.

Proof of what I am, where I am, who I am? e.g a police-style mugshot, not too glamorous but still a snapshot in time – albeit a staged one (a la **Cindy Sherman**). Bordering on an official representation of the self or the true self – e.g in societies where people only exist if they have an ID card. Even in civilised society such as ours, Transgender identities only exist at the end of a very long and harrowing process of examinations, surgery, appointments, travelling, waiting, therapies, more waiting, and counselling. Until then the state does not recognise them as people, as that document – the birth certificate – may depict information which was only right at *that time*.

That's all any image – photograph – record – is, a snapshot of something *at that time*. Yet the image itself remains eternal.

Me, and me – or, him and her - two halves existing in the same body space and sharing the same mind. Both ephemeral, but one a lot more than the other.
Original idea of a collage or photomontage, or sequence of images showing the 'alter ego', again, as Sherman did in her series of film stills.
Rebuses or other montages of words and images encompassing aspects of the self – to think is to be – i.e we think ourselves into being.

Who are you? I am what I am. God creates Adam, and in a way a transg person gives life to a new person from inside themselves and 'make it real'. It's not a case of 'pretending' to be something – it's a case of *being,* of giving form to something which otherwise only exists within the neurones and synapses of the cross-gendered mind, clothing the physical body to express what the mind can't externalise any other way.

Quote from Cindy Sherman in her essay on *Complete Untitled Film Stills:* 'I suppose...I was wrestling with some sort of turmoil of my own about understanding women. The characters...were women struggling with something...but then you...wonder if maybe 'they' are not what that the clothes are communicating...There are so many levels of artifices.' *Understanding* them – how they are presented, how they choose to present themselves, the concept of the 'male gaze' which Sherman's work alludes to (though unintentionally, as she states in her essay). That there is more behind what the clothes simply communicate to the viewer – or what they mean to the wearer. The irony of there being no 'film' from which Sherman's stills originate – although there could well be, as they look familiar, even clichéd – meaning that the world in which the stills exist are self-contained. It is therefore not *false* representation – but a representation of representation itself.

While Sherman abdicates all personal identity in her series, where she fought hard to *not* look like herself, or even have her characters look similar, in her series - Nan Goldin's self portraits are unequivocally her – especially the traumatic image of *Nan a Month after Being Beaten Up*. Yet even in that image she remains glamorous, with tidy hair, makeup, glossy lipstick, and a defiant look to the camera which clearly shows the effect of the abuse.

I decided to present myself in different forms, different characters and personalities as far removed from my normal self as possible – yet being channeled through the medium of the artist, where does the self end and the work begin? In the eye of the viewer, the “I” referred to in a poem need not be the poet themselves - but the poem.

By way of a brief, we present:

Reflections of Identity (cf. The portrait taken in the mirror)

Potential disciplines: photography, portraiture, performance, photomontage, digital design**,** drawing
Potential themes/references: personal identity, glamour, media depictions of femininity, internal vs external notions of identity, gender identification and public presentation, visual narrative, low culture press, the narcissism of celebrity and public consumption of same
Developed from: *Arte Povera* project in Semester 1, transgender identity generally, personal circumstances, philosophy of the self
Reading list: Cindy Sherman, Nan Goldin, Douglas Gordon, Gavin Turk, Hannah Hoch, Warhol, CG Jung (specifically archetypes and the *anima* function of the male psyche)

Initial Aims/expected outcomes:

- produce a series of photographic works complete in themselves but also linked by the above themes, using the artist's female *alter ego* as the subject;
- explore personal identity with reference to broader transgender culture and perceptions;
- provide full documentary support for each series;
- broaden my own experience of producing photographic artwork, and develop nascent performance practice to camera;
- consider the wider aspects of capturing in still form the essence of *being* someone else – with wider reference to set design/location, costume, pose, overall presentation, etc.

Taking the ideas of a series of transgendered portraits....various personae, in various situations a la Cindy Sherman, Douglas Gordon, with examples of possible results as follows:

- expanding upon this brief by exploring further fabrications of imagery used by the media, advertising, glamour – fake news, celeb gossip sheets. Front cover pix of *Hellooo* magazine and tabloid paparazzi mentality. To go as far as constructing an identity for this purpose, with 'stories' and a life which is explored and lived through the medium of fake celeb news – *to create myth via a semi-mythical persona*
- constructs of fake advertising, paper/magazine/journal articles illustrated by, again, further developments of the above style of photographic portraiture featuring the same

character/s – exploring those 'levels of artifices' described by Sherman – and the means of myth-making* perpetuated by the media industries upon their human products (stars, singers, celebs) *ref. Barthes' concepts of the *myth* – quoted in Sherman '75-'93 – and Jung's broader definition of myth and archetypes as a metaphorical system to help manage our personal transformation in life

- self portraits either as possibly identifiable individuals. Mug-shots, straight to camera, or in unexpected or domestic settings. Or else as totally anonymous 'characters', whether hookers or drug addicts to starlets or business women in an attempt capture the essence of what makes such a character recognisable, timeless or even a cliché.
- Questioning, challenging: how women feel about themselves being presented or viewed in a certain way – what about someone who isn't female but looks it, presenting themselves in the same manner? And what about the 'male gaze' with regard to same?
- Or...taking the 'self portrait' idea even further...to make a series of drawings based on photographed staged scenes and/or portraits, drawn after a depiction of the reality. Adding an extra layer of 'artifice' to the representation – as in layers of make-up on a face, a layer of photography recording that face, and then a layer of art to further remove, and step back from, the reality of that single moment in time.

The self-conscious critical bit:

Can this concept sustain a whole month of work?

All photography and modelling work will need to be carried out at home/other private locations – not possible logistically and personally to do in the DJCAD studios.

Serious anxiety over how such a very personal work may be received by colleagues etc. - confusion, hostility?

The above was the complete brief as presented to Kev at the start of the project. Discussion with Kev allayed all possible fear regarding the viability of this project and got me motivated to produce the sort of work I had initially considered for the Poor Art piece last year.

Of cross-gender identification: why is it such an issue for so many?

I always saw it as a process of transformation, an alchemical crucible which gives access to a part of the mind, and personality, otherwise out of reach. It's not a simple act of *wearing* something – it's a long and complex act of *becoming*, where every detail that can be changed, is changed, shaped and modelled as far as physical limitations allow.

The blurring of the reality of the self between worlds - by creating a new identity, or assuming the outer appearance of something or someone else, we gain insight into those other states of being, and learn what it means to be like the thing we are imitating, dressing as, masquerading as: shamanistic culture has been aware of this for centuries. We transcend ourselves and become an amalgam of two selves, two bodies sharing one mind, or indeed one mind split between two bodies. We become independent of the sole governing ego and subsume our identity to a new reality.

"In arcane lore, the person capable of enforcing the change of physical matter from one state to another is the alchemist or *androgyne* – the latter being a fusion of male and female. He-She corresponds to a nptopm of God, that is, a coincidence of opposites. Throughout highly disparate cultures such a person is often assigned the role of shaman or seer, the see-er of the future, like Tiresias of Greek tragedy, or the Seller of Salt, the Salt Merchant of *kabbalism* and alchemy...

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..The ontological artist...as Duchamp had anticipated and indicated, is the one whose work is completed in the public psyche. It must be noted that the psyche is primed by a literature of myth...The mythical personage of the androgyne is the exteriorization of Duchamp himself, expressed through the surrogate adventure that began when the Nude Descended the Staircase, became the Bride, was stripped Bare by Her Bachelors – female and male personae who ultimately united in the androgyne as impersonated by Duchamp in transvestiture."

- Rober Pincus-Witten: *Theatre of the Conceptual: Autobiography and Myth* (1973)

Consider Madonna as the ultimate post-modernist re-inventor of the self, appropriating the looks of others to redefine her own public image, as routinely as Bowie went through phases of self-reinvention (we've become so used to seeing Madonna as a blonde, that we forget she is a natural brunette – her first public act of re-invention). Madonna has been dubbed 'the Queen of Appropriation', assuming the likeness of Monroe, Dietrich, Lauren Bacall...what's so radical about a guy doing the same? That was one of the basic aims of this project – to see just how *different* I *could* become, the aim which Cindy Sherman strove for during her *Untitled Film Stills*. As she said herself when seeing her stills presented in gallery space, she was concerned when she saw two blondes together, fearing that they would look too similar.

But I also wanted to connect all of the characters in some way, to link them in a chain, and ultimately, end up with a complex, multi-layered piece that spoke both inwardly (the artist presenting themselves with different faces representing inner worlds) and outwardly (expressing the current American political and social situation, as well as more general themes of TG identity and public representation).

"We keep passing unseen through little moments of other people's lives" - Robert M Pirsig

This was role-playing combined with the creation of graphic narrative – a re-imagining of the most basic concept of the comic book, or illustrated story book.

In building narratives out of the raw photographic footage, I developed concepts with which I'm already familiar: as a comic book creator, artist/storyteller – creating characters, depicting a narrative through words and pictures but now through the medium of photography rather than drawn panels. Therefore branching out into theatre, performance art, and blurring the line between reality and what is fabrication – and making an entry into the genre of self-portraiture that fragments, dissects, reinvents the self and allows the viewer a certain creativity in judging the artist through the work – or the aspect of the artist which has been depicted, at any rate. The visit to the DCA with Edmund to view the Mark Wallinger exhibition also informed this line of inquiry, by allowing me to view some of the more abstract ways in which the artist can depict themselves – even in works in which they never appear literally, and indeed seem even to avoid physical representation in favour of the abstract.

Most of the first week was spent getting photographic ideas down. These first sessions took place in my house, where I could spend all night dressing the set, re-arranging furniture and seeking a suitable backdrop to bring out the character. In that time I developed two socially similar, but politically opposite, individuals: a New York anti-Trump street punk (**Sherry**), whose views and feelings would be expressed through a personal diary; and a Texas redneck (**Missy**).

Physical presentation of the piece took shape in an organic way as more characters were conceived and photographed, and I considered how each might present *themselves* to an audience, if requested, or required. The idea of the New York street punk's (s)crapbook was the first – holding scrawlings of thoughts and observations reflecting both inner, and outer, concerns. I thought about fixing the photos of her in the book by using hairpins, as a temporary (and potentially lasting) solution, which would give a mobility to the images, allowing them to be reassembled as the work progressed, or even removed for exhibition or other purposes. But the hairpins wouldn't remain in place, and the idea of using them as paperclips failed.

'Sherry' (New York)

6′4″
6′2″
6′0″
5′8″
5′6″
5′4″
5′4″
5′2″

The first sequence to be completed was the New York streetfighter Sherry's diary – a simple card-covered scrapbook which reflects its owner in the sense of a 'blank canvas' that could have become anything, with limitless possibilities – presenting vistas of colour, wonder, adventure or study - but in the end, like her life itself, amounting to little more than a rag-bag collection of thoughts, reflections, dreams, hopes, and a few hints at a past life fraught with letdowns and little opportunity to break out of the rut and the downtrodden cycle. The diary ends abruptly on an ominous note, yet the book is barely half full – what happens next is surely in the hands of NY law enforcement as much as in Sherry's own. The one positive aspect is that the majority of the book – or her life story – is yet to be written.

Through her random scrawls we gain insights into her loves – smoking, most likely the illegal kind; angry rock 'n roll men; and being loved, a condition we reckon she has experienced very little of, symbolised by the recurring signature tag of the angular love heart, drawn with sharp corners rather than the more usual curves – suggesting love on *her* own terms.

“There is no sin but the lack of love” - Paulo Coelho

And in its absence, Sherry has found hate – both general and personal – easier to relate to, and react to – finding physical form in her retaliation against Trump's intolerance.

Writing Sherry's life in scraps and scribbles, reflecting it in lyrics and snatches of poetry, allowed me to imagine a much bigger picture, yet the impression remains that the contents of the book are little more than the latest repetitions of a cycle of similar situations and circumstances stretching back through her adulthood, featuring the odd shattering apocalyptic moment: 'slaughterhouse junkie blood fuckin bath man...I still get flashbacks'.

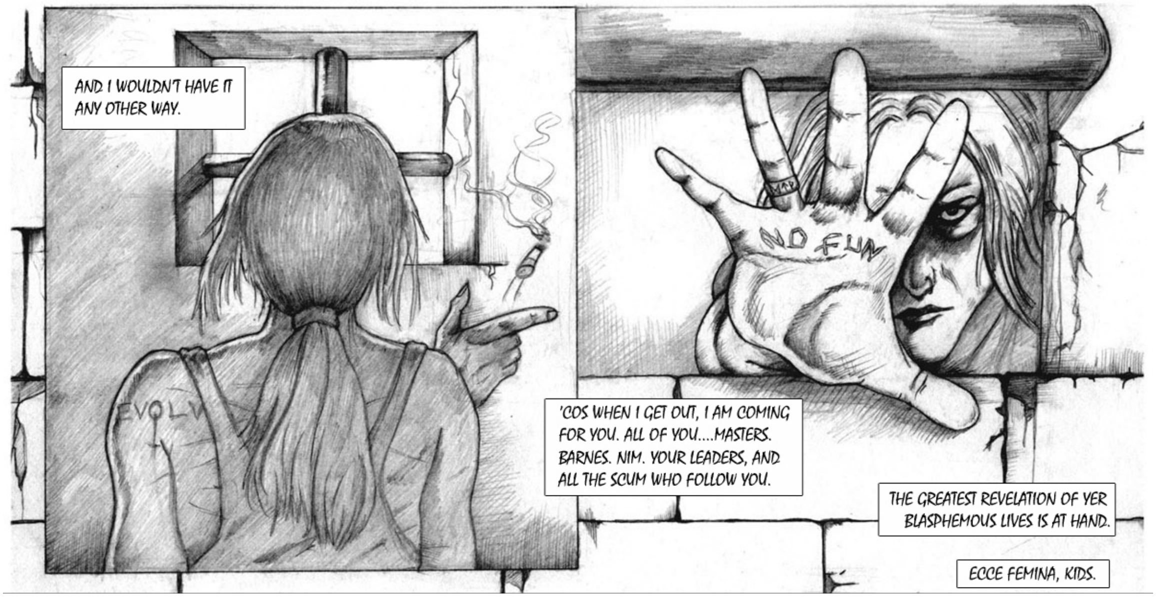
Details of Sherry's experiences were informed by my online relationship with a woman from Manhattan: such as the 'always shouting' German and Serbian neighbours, and the incident with the prudish Islamic taxi driver who kept his hand on his loaded .45 whilst berating his female passenger for wearing a skirt of immodest length. These tales were related to me in great detail and their flavour and colour were transferred easily to Sherry's gritty existence.

Her story is one that has no real beginning – she announces herself first with a quote from Bruce Springsteen's début album, released in 1972, which may be as old as Sherry herself – and on the next page goes on to greet us with a “So this me Sherry yo!” - as loud as any welcoming cry from an embarrassingly highly-strung friend in a city street. Her story has no real end either – it hangs on a note of uncertainty, wondering why she has suddenly become a subject for photographers (whether artistic, or hired by the NYPD). Nor does it even have a middle. She lives in a perpetual 'now' – like many of the current generation. She speaks in the present tense, even when describing the past: “So this photographer dude downtown asks me if he can take my photo...”, or “Taxi driver last nite throws my ass out of his cab...”

Or, to put Sherri in context: *“The destruction of the past is one of the most characteristic and eerie phenomena of the late 20th Century. Most young men and women at the century's end grow up in a sort of permanent present lacking any organic relation to the public past of the times they live in.”*
- Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: the Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991*

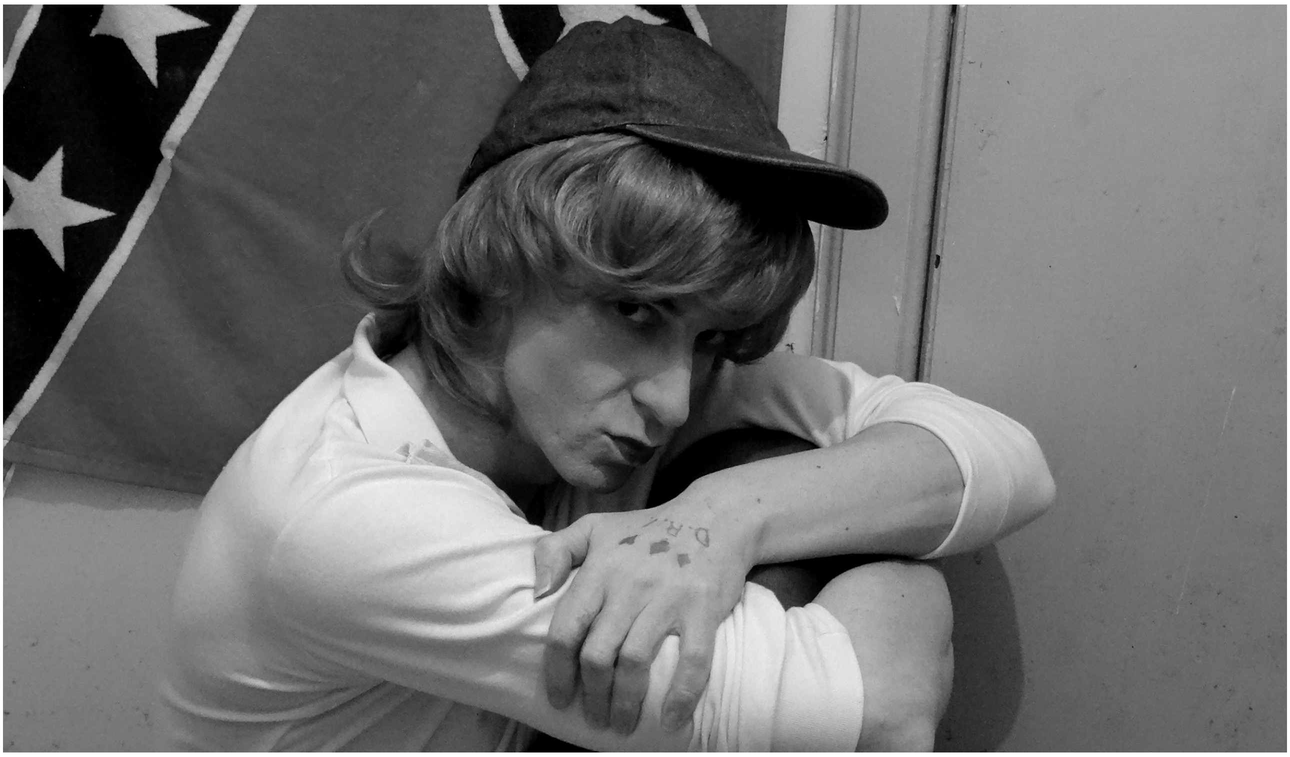
Setting her life in New York also allowed me to 'cash in' on the current *Zeitgeist* facing the new Trump administration, and set the character's sights firmly against the President and his home state NYPD 'Nazis'. Whether Sherry is supposed to be genetically female, or some level of transgender, is up to the public to decide (although the police mugshot height indicator might be a giveaway) – in any case she has cause to be upset by the new president's views, channelled through rock and punk music of the 1970s and 80s, and manifested ultimately through her participation in a protest march – driven hard, no doubt, by the music and lyrics in her head.

In many ways, Sherry is a later development of the main character in my first graphic novel, *The Black Flag* – arch-anarchist and Irish revolutionary Georgina McDubhghaill – who, through some subterranean synchronicity stretching back 17 years, just happens to have the title of an Iggy Pop song carved into her right palm:


AND I WOULDN'T HAVE IT ANY OTHER WAY.
EVOLV
NO FUN
'COS WHEN I GET OUT, I AM COMING FOR YOU. ALL OF YOU....MASTERS. BARNES. NIM. YOUR LEADERS, AND ALL THE SCUM WHO FOLLOW YOU.
THE GREATEST REVELATION OF YER BLASPHEMOUS LIVES IS AT HAND.
ECCE FEMINA, KIDS.

Panels from The Black Flag, Phase 1 (2000 - 2005, Fenriswulf Books)

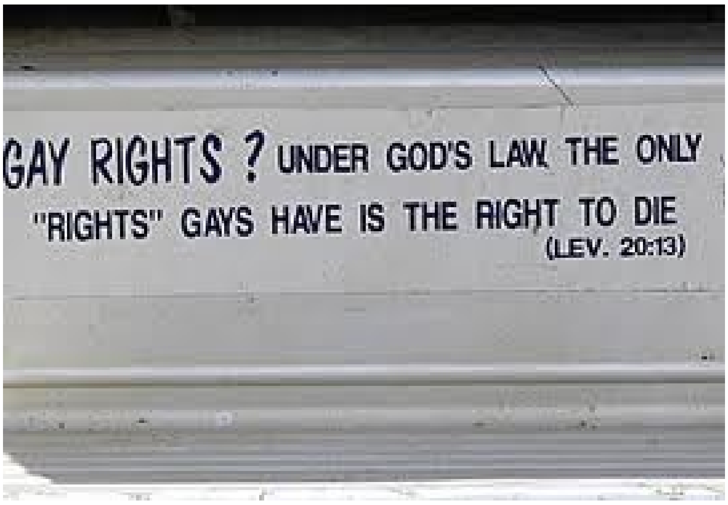
'Missy'



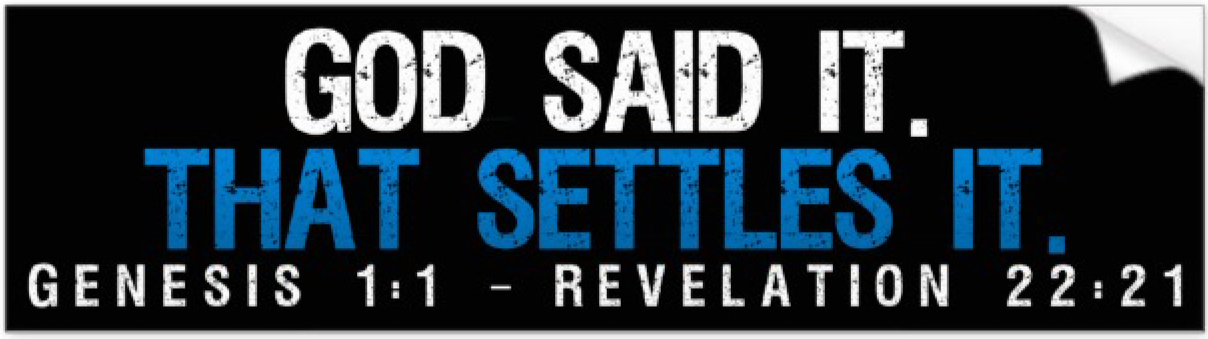
The epitome – if not a stereotype – of the poor white underclass of the Southern states, Missy grew out of the pushy anger and injustice which fuels Sherry's life. A Texan and Trump supporter, her heritage evident in the Southern Cross flag depicted in her portraits. After all it wasn't just Michael Moore's "stupid white men" who voted for Trump – many stupid (and doubtless, some educated) white women did so, too; and Texas, with its Mexican border, must have more than its share.

Like Sherry, she has a liking for wonky tattoos and noisy punk bands – specifically DRI, a long-running underground outfit from Houston, Texas – although her chain-smoking habit is the main object of interest. Her narrative is less complex – a tomboyish, slightly androgynous character, whose social and political stance, whilst easy to revile, has unexpectedly found a majority in the United States. She is the opposite of Sherry's twitchy, anxiety-ridden underdog, fighting city hall, kicking The Man...after all, Missy's people *won. "Get over it,"* would be her slogan, three words filled with a smug satisfaction that the stage is now set for her brand of intolerance and 'stupid white trash' mentality to take centre stage on the planet. Yet she and the other millions like her are ordinary, human, people, just like us, too; they have simply helped to create what could become one of the most divisive social and political situations for decades, if not centuries.

Is Missy religious? We don't know, but the Bible makes a convenient reference point for pointless hatred:


GAY RIGHTS ? UNDER GOD'S LAW THE ONLY
"RIGHTS" GAYS HAVE IS THE RIGHT TO DIE
(LEV. 20:13)

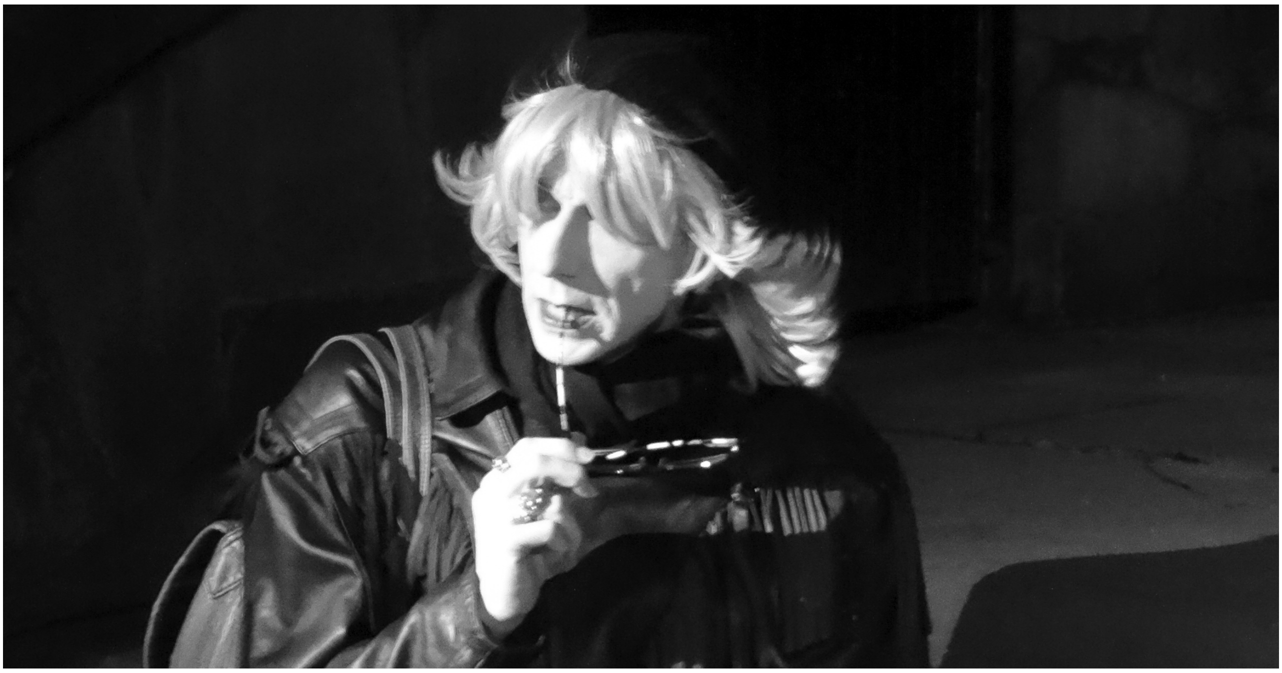
And if she drove a car, along with the usual Southern Rebel schtick decorating the rear bumper, we'd no doubt find more sentiments in tune with the following:


GOD SAID IT.
THAT SETTLES IT.
GENESIS 1:1 - REVELATION 22:21

Be scared of Missy.

She had so much power all of this time, and nobody knew. Intellectuals and liberals, tolerant and free-thinking individuals would dismiss her existence as irrelevant, part of a troubling, noisy yet unrepresented underclass – until *now.* She is a piece of shrapnel lodged in the flesh of America – her palette bearing the colours of her national flag (red hair, white sports top, blue jeans), her blue denim the material of the working class which founded the nation she is so proud to be a part of.

'Pola'



By the second week, I had enlisted the help of a friend, who travelled down from Stonehaven on Monday night. We went through to Dundee with me dressed in full character and shot in several locations in Dundee city centre. The streets were very quiet at midnight and this allowed us to use various landmarks in the shots.

I gave my friend basic instructions such as "try to get a variety of close up, and distance shots", but aside from myself going through a sequence of unrehearsed movements and poses, I had no other control over the shoot – in direct contrast to the first two sessions, where I reviewed and critiqued each sequence as I went along, refining angles, framing, and pose. Having no idea how the finished shots would turn out allowed me complete freedom to create a sequence freed from the artist's hand being present in every detail, and ultimately relinquish directorship to somebody else. And not knowing when she would choose to close the shutter meant that I basically had to forget about the presence of the photographer and simply remain in character until Suze decided to call 'time'. This allowed the capture of images of the artist and their *alter ego* from the point of view of the audience, the spectator, the general public – the view that a passer-by would have had of this brief piece of public performance. Pola's wardrobe was carefully chosen in advance of the exterior shoot – almost totally black, apart from the hair, itself crowned by a black woollen cap in order to minimise the range of colour tones in the final image, presenting essentially a *binary* – or predominately "black and white" - subject in a world which, nonetheless, is otherwise full of colour – although the nocturnal setting blacked out that colour range. This monochromatic schema was a direct reference to *Binary,* the black and white sculptural piece produced for the *Arte Povera* brief last year, itself an ironic comment on the fixed gender roles still insisted upon by large sections of contemporary society. The final outcome of the 'Pola' shoot was therefore a character dressed in a black/white colour scheme, whilst simultaneously inhabiting a non-binary reality, by virtue of her existence and presence in a public space.

As it turned out, I was more than impressed with Susie's handling of the shoot and I selected nine of her images to be printed out for possible use in the finished presentation.

The outdoor nocturnal portrait has a certain timeless, and often isolatory, aspect, and I wanted to capture the contrast between the individual seated in the bar, and afterwards, out and about in the city – at the same time looking lost, alone, yet dressed in a way that would suggest she might be comfortable being out by herself after dark – or at least, was used to it. This character was more nebulous, and firmly rooted in Dundee. Seemingly at home in the bar, she seems less at ease outdoors, as though looking out for something, or someone. I originally named her Paula, after her passing similarity to the late Paula Yates, but after discussion with Ian, decided upon a Central or Eastern European background for her. So she was renamed Pola.

Above the ground-level, gutter-dwelling Sherry and Missy, for Pola, life seems to go on as before – hanging out in bars, drinking, socialising, as seen through the camera lens of her documenter. Except when she gets outside, and then she doesn't seem too sure which way to turn; even gnawing on the leg of her glasses as though considering what she ought to be looking at. Is she short-sighted? Has she taken them off to see better, or to obfuscate something she would rather not see? We are given no deeper insight into Pola's life or opinions. She looks Eastern European by virtue of her dress and style, and is probably happy living in her newly-adopted democratic homeland. But when darkness falls, and we're out by ourselves – sometimes we have to make a decision of which road to follow, which corner to turn; and there lies the root of social anxiety.

Having to make a decision.

'Rosalind Russell'

By revisiting old photographs of me in the vague style of a fading Hollywood actress, I created a third character – one now likely dead, by the chronology of the first two contemporary characters – who had starred in a fictional movie entitled *Madame Eva*, set in the Deep South. I gave her the name Rosalind Russell – somewhere between Rita Hayworth and Jane Russell – and painted her as the title character for a cinema poster, reproduced in Missy's portrait series. We might imagine that the *Madame Eva* movie, being of its time, might feature borderline racist undertones, and could well be one of those features (along with *Song of the South* and many others) currently banned from American television. As a member of the Hollywood golden age of the '40s, Rosalind would represent the epitomé of glamour – itself a two-faced illusion, an artifice with which to beguile and enchant (to refer to the original definition of the word).

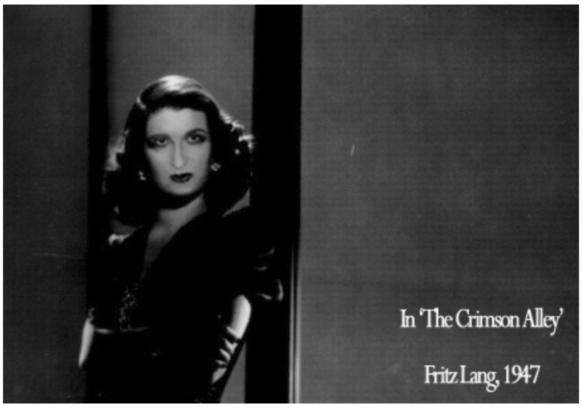
None of Rosalind's photographic portrait images were created for the project – the latest pictures would date from about 2005. I wanted to work only with archival material for her contribution, reworking and editing existing shots to create new works – even going so far as to digitally insert her into existing movie frames, a slight reference to Woody Allen's movie *Zelig* which saw Allen's character similarly edited into historical footage – many years before *Forrest Gump* pulled the same trick. Old photos were inserted into mock-up magazines.

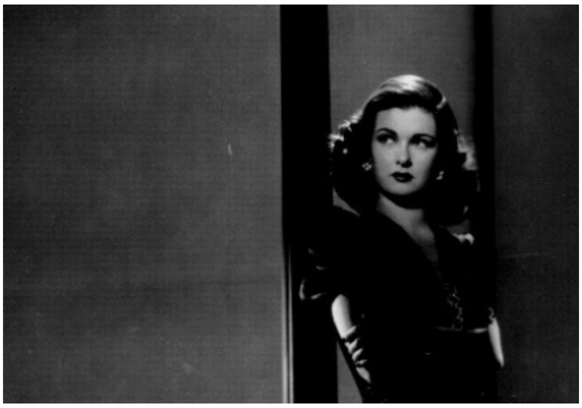
In researching old cinema magazines of the 1940s and 1950s, I was surprised to find that almost all of the cover images were paintings or drawings – almost always of female stars – and so I decided that the centrepiece for Rosalind would be the cover of a fictitious movie mag, produced – I hoped – in the style of the time, which would be a difficult challenge in recreating a style of commercial illustration from 70 years ago:

Movie Mirror
Silver Screen
MOVIE STARS PARADE
MOVIE-RADIO GUIDE
Movie Life
Modern Screen
Silver Screen
MOVIE STARS PARADE
MODERN SCREEN
Motion Picture
Confidential

So I drew up, in full colour pencil, an overly glamourised version of one of the earliest pictures I ever took in 'Rosalind' mode:

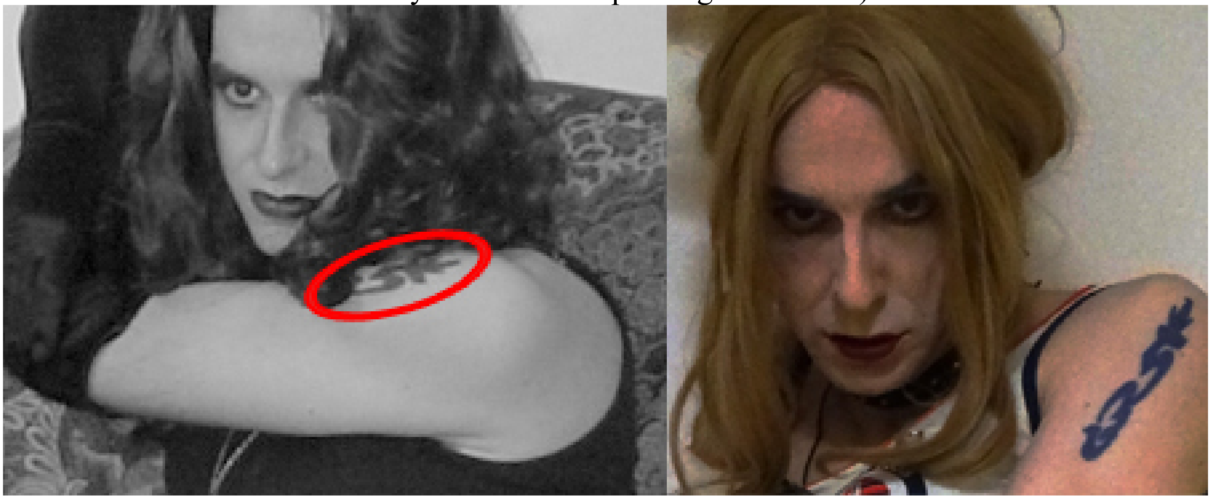
'Rosalind' took the place of Joan Bennett in Fritz Lang's noir *Scarlet Street* – which I renamed *The Crimson Alley* – via a subtle bit of Photoshopping:





Original film still with Bennett from Scarlet Street

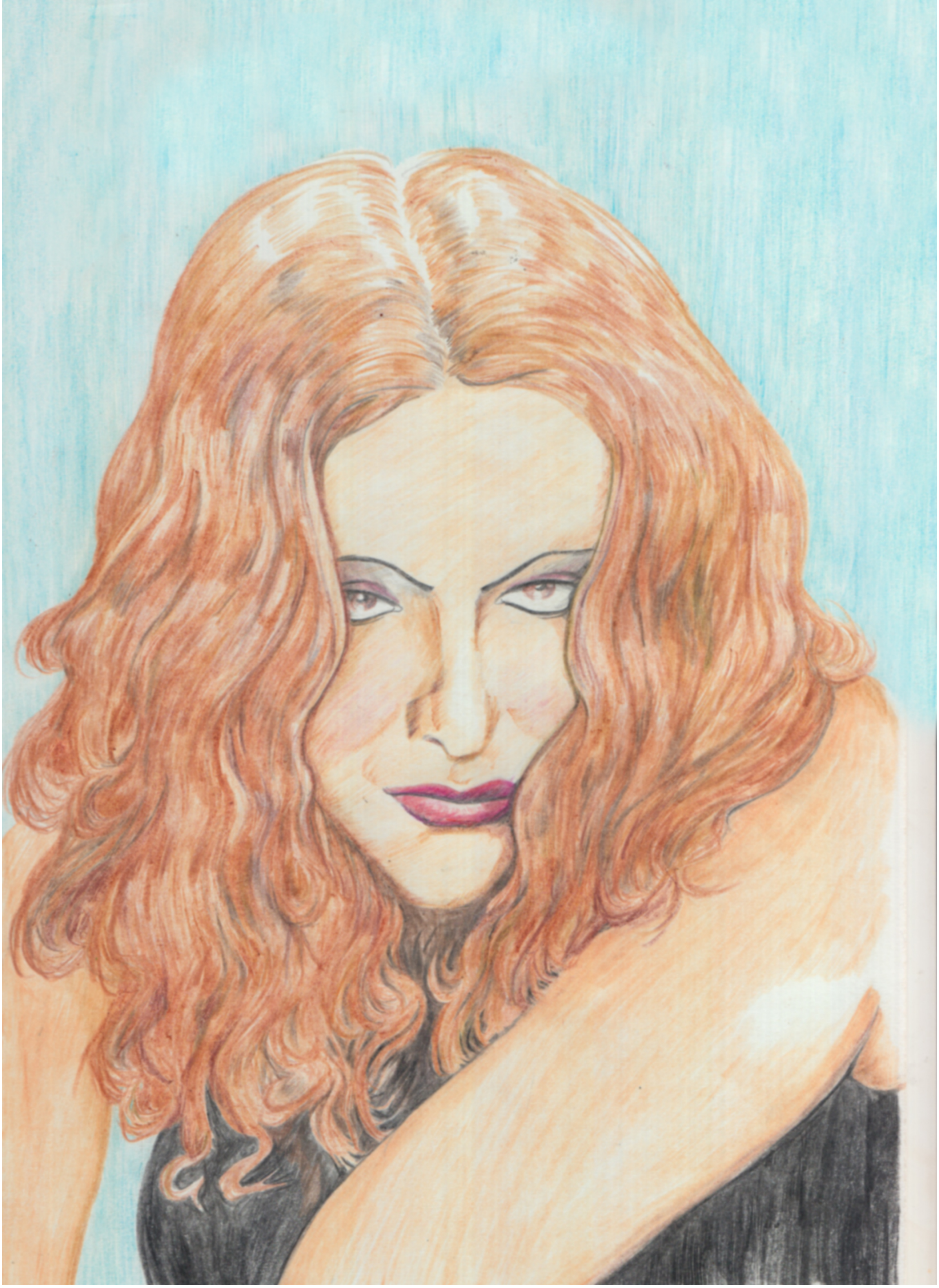
One accidental – but amusing – subversion of the 'fake reality' of Rosalind's series is the presence of the tattoo on her left arm – the same design sported by Sherry on hers. It is a subtle detail, not immediately obvious, but its very presence helps to subvert the whole fabrication of the reality, unravelling the layers of artifice so carefully constructed and revealing, to the eye of the keen observer, the artificial nature of the whole work – as Russell and Sherry have lives about 70 years apart. It does, however, maintain the threads of continuity set up elsewhere – Rosalind's poster appearance on Missy's door. (Ref: Paul Auster – most recent novel – randomness, identity slipping between individuals – and David Lynch's metamorphosing characters.)



Finally, by the third week, I decided to create one new series of 'Rosalind' – hoping that I would look sufficiently older than in the earlier pictures to signify the end (and nadir) of her career, with her appearance in the 1970s exploitation shocker *Fraulien Helga* - the kind of outrageous European grindhouse material which would blacken anyone's CV. The hair is the same – just styled less glamorously, with all the original ringlets brushed out and backcombed to give it a fuller 1970s look. Rosalind bowed out disgracefully, which was probably another reason why she appealed to Missy...

ROSALIND RUSSELL
is
Fraulien HELGA
With
Wolf Bender
Larry Nacho
Produced by
Burt Trautmann

Promotional press card for Rosalind's final appearance



(Sadly the original pencil drawing for Rosalind's magazine cover seems to have gone walkabout...but here's an un-Photoshopped facsimile of the original)

Lita

The last shoot I did at the end of week 2. Despite having to spend over 2 hours on the floor due to the need to mount the camera high, but within operational reach, shooting Lita's series was huge fun. Originally channelling Mapplethorpe, and Warhol (referencing his bleached-out, over-saturated portraits of Debbie Harry and Liza Minnelli), I aimed for something contemporary, pushy, overtly sexual yet still ambivalent. Is the subject supposed to be female, or just look a bit like it? The fun 'lad mag' cover does nothing to explain the situation, describing its centrefold subject as a 'TV chick' – is she famous for being on television, or for being a crossdresser?

(The anchor point for the sequence was a pictorial I remember from about 1999 or 2000 featuring the Catatonia singer Cerys Mathews, who I was a big fan of at the time (and who was the original model for Georgina in the *Black Flag* graphic novel, due to her strong Celtic looks). Despite her overt Welsh housewife stage persona, the magazine (FHM, or something like that) decided to dress her in a skintight black PVC catsuit and let her play around with a Rambo knife, as though about to engage in serious edge play. It was that level of overly fetishistic, and lowbrow exploitative presentation, which I wanted to capture for Lita – tempered by a hint of Madonna's portrayal of herself as a softporn S & M sex icon in her million-selling ode to narcissism *Sex* book.)

Lita – whatever she is, television personality, or cross-gendered rock star – is likely as shallow as her images suggest. The *Crosstitution* piece being the most obvious, hinting at the ways in which female celebrities simultaneously use, and are used by, the 'male gaze' – again, Madonna being the obvious case in point – a subject I approached last year in the 'Rock Girls' video piece assembled during the Cut & Paste project. Does this kind of depiction empower and liberate the subject, or simply dress up old and tired degrading clichés in trendy postmodernist rags? Sex always sold, and it still does, although these days it's less obvious who's doing the exploiting. Women are undeniably more in control of their own bodies now than during previous eras, but the tendency to misrepresent, misinterpret, and appeal to the lowest common denominator (signified bluntly by the *Bollocks!* lad mag cover blurbs) is still with us. With the increasing blurring of gender lines, however, it'll be interesting to see how things develop from here onwards.

For presentation, I planned an ascending 'hierarchy' of characterization – rising up from Sherry and Missy (ground level) → Pola → Lita → Rosalind; the highest, the most unattainable, visible only in her soft-focus Hollywood media publicity. Only the latter-day publicity still from Fraulien *Helga* gives any hint of the reality of her personality, which would be decades after her celebrity star had already plunged. We therefore travel upwards from contemporary 'grass roots' (dope pun intended) through not only time but space too, the props depicting the grungy NYC apartment being fully 'earthed', while Rosalind's images are almost literally out of sight – just as the lifestyles of celebrities and Hollywood stars remain to the rest of us. Lita ranks below Rosalind, as the embodiment of a modern-day *celeb* though without the glamour and mystique of Rosalind and her kind. Pushy, in-your-face, and no doubt all over social media with 1 million+ fans on Facebook or Twitter, Lita is more accessible and interactive than any old-time glamour star would ever have allowed themselves to be. Lita's probably all too aware of how limited her time in the spotlight may be, and would be determined to milk it for every drop. The insinuation is that Sherry is probably a fan of hers, as Missy is still quite taken with Rosalind, with Pola as real-life neighbour or associate of either, or both.

The Photographer (Randolf Schnabel)

I thought about the character of the person behind the lens, and behind the pen/pencil as well – the creator of the visual works which will be displayed. Who were they? What was their motivation for depicting these individuals – photojournalism, cultural recording, simple portraiture? Did they deliberately construct their own narrative from the persons involved – did they direct them, or simply allow them to act as themselves in front of the camera – as I did on my Dundee location shoot with Susie? Sherry briefly mentions him as “this photographer dude” who simply asks her if he can take her picture – and we therefore assume he is responsible for all of the pictures present in the scrapbook (apart from the last, courtesy of the NYPD). I thought about presenting a few pieces by 'the photographer' from each of his female subjects – either titled or untitled – to be shown either in a browser or in a wall display of some sort.

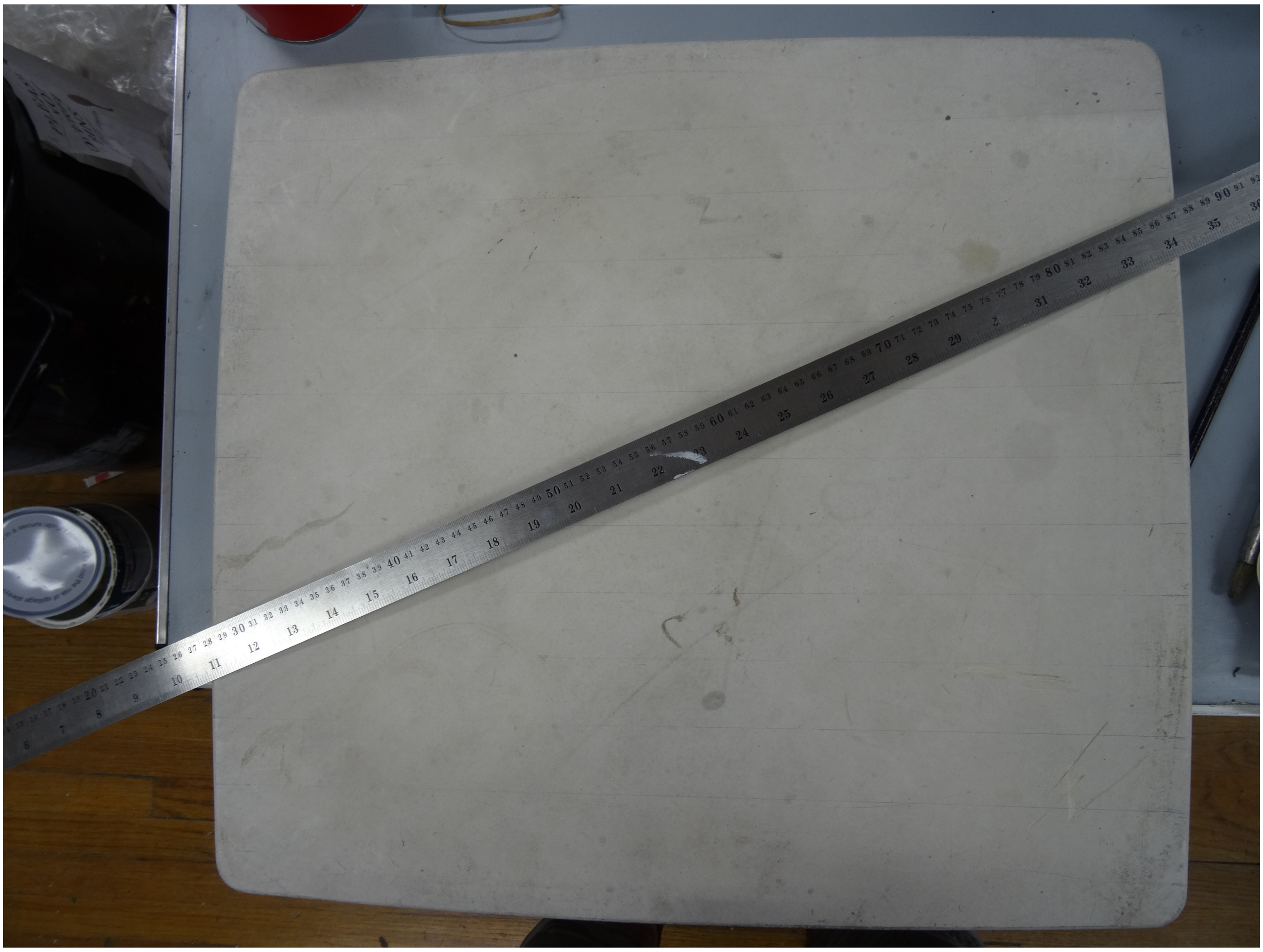
Instead, they ended up in a haphazard array, plastered over the wall like so many pinups, taking the form of the DIY picture galleries found in any teenage or student bedroom – or indeed in a downtrodden Manhattan apartment.

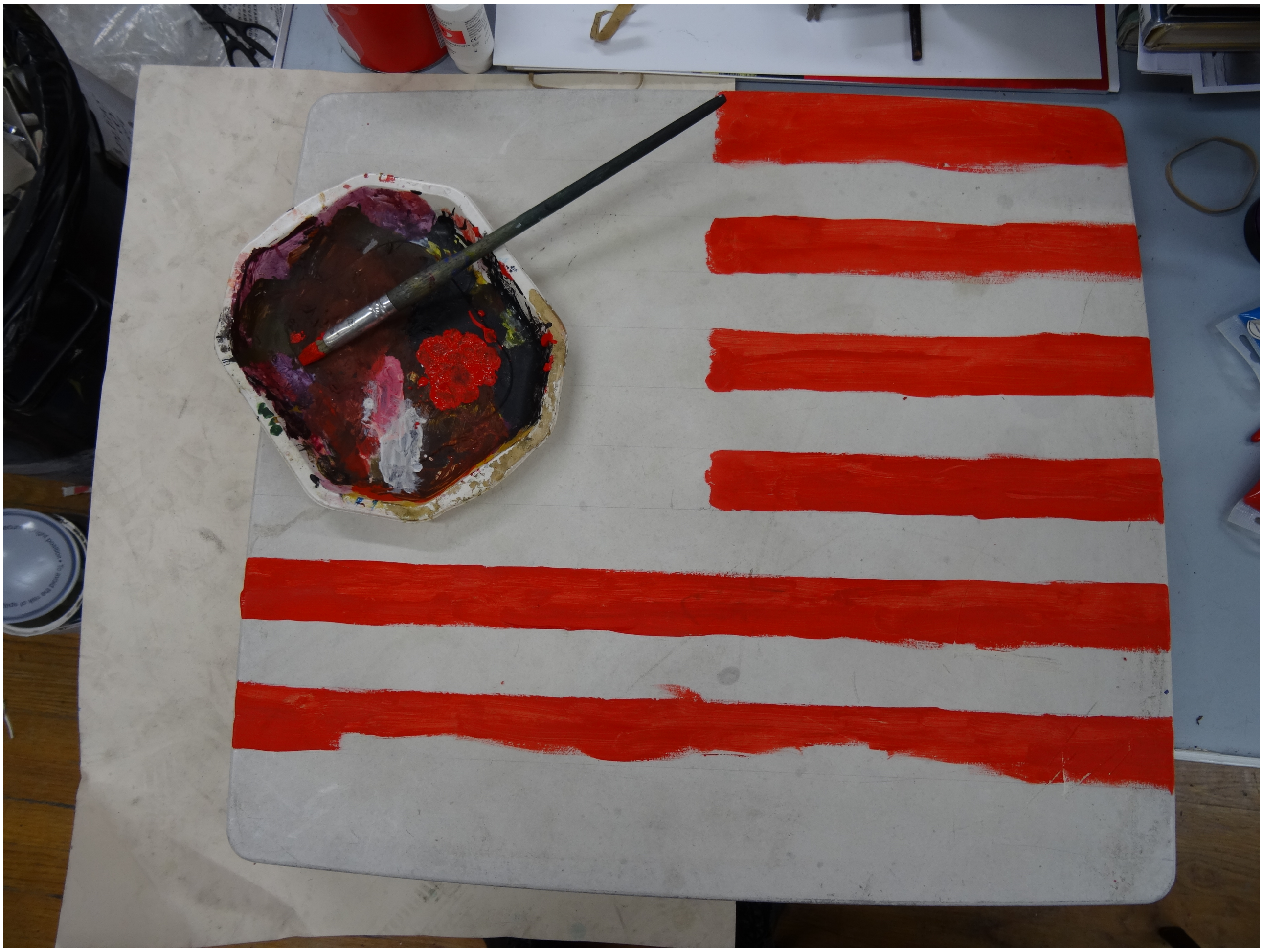
Re-painting the Flag

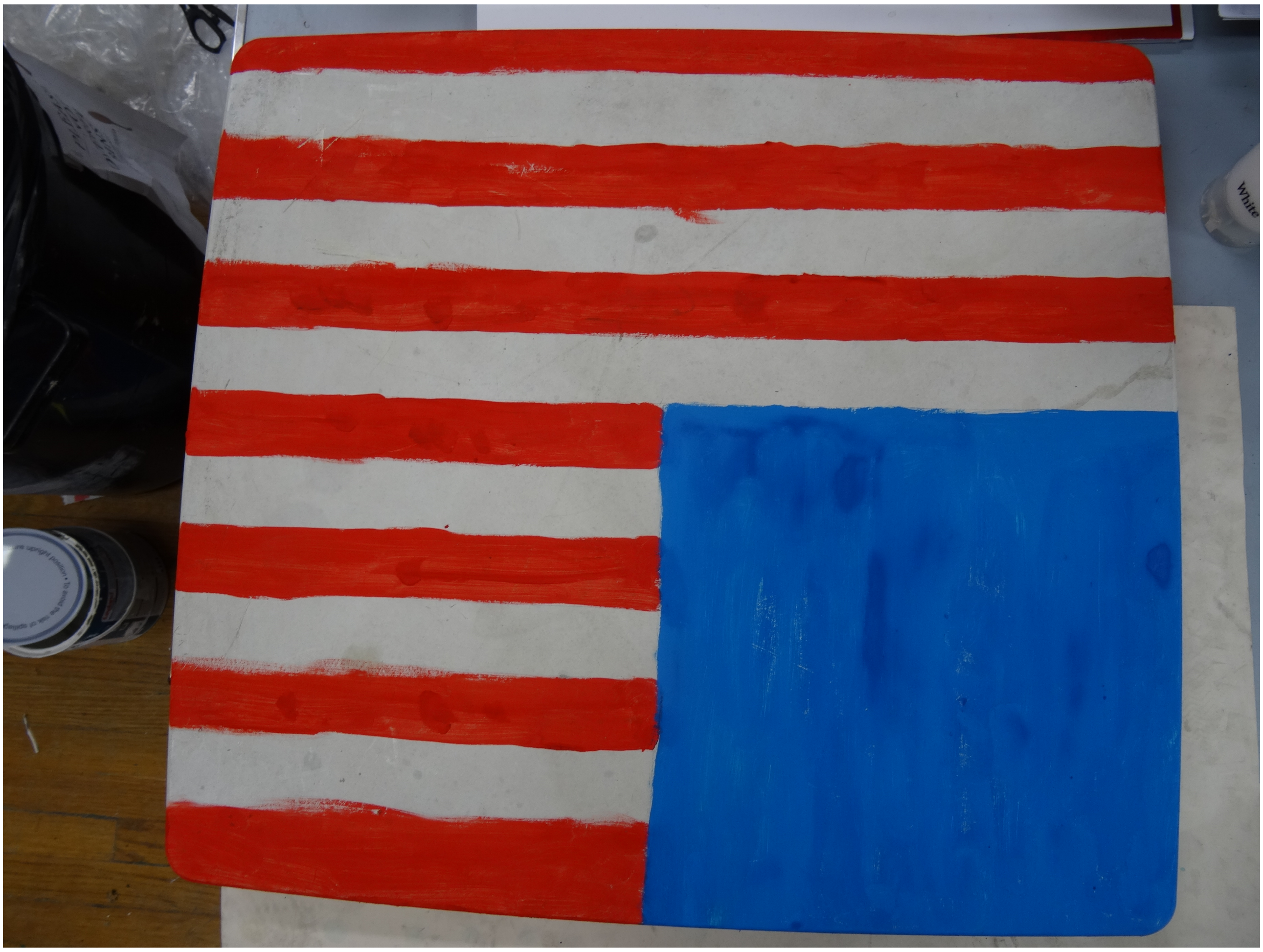
The Divided States: Visualising Social Dichotomy

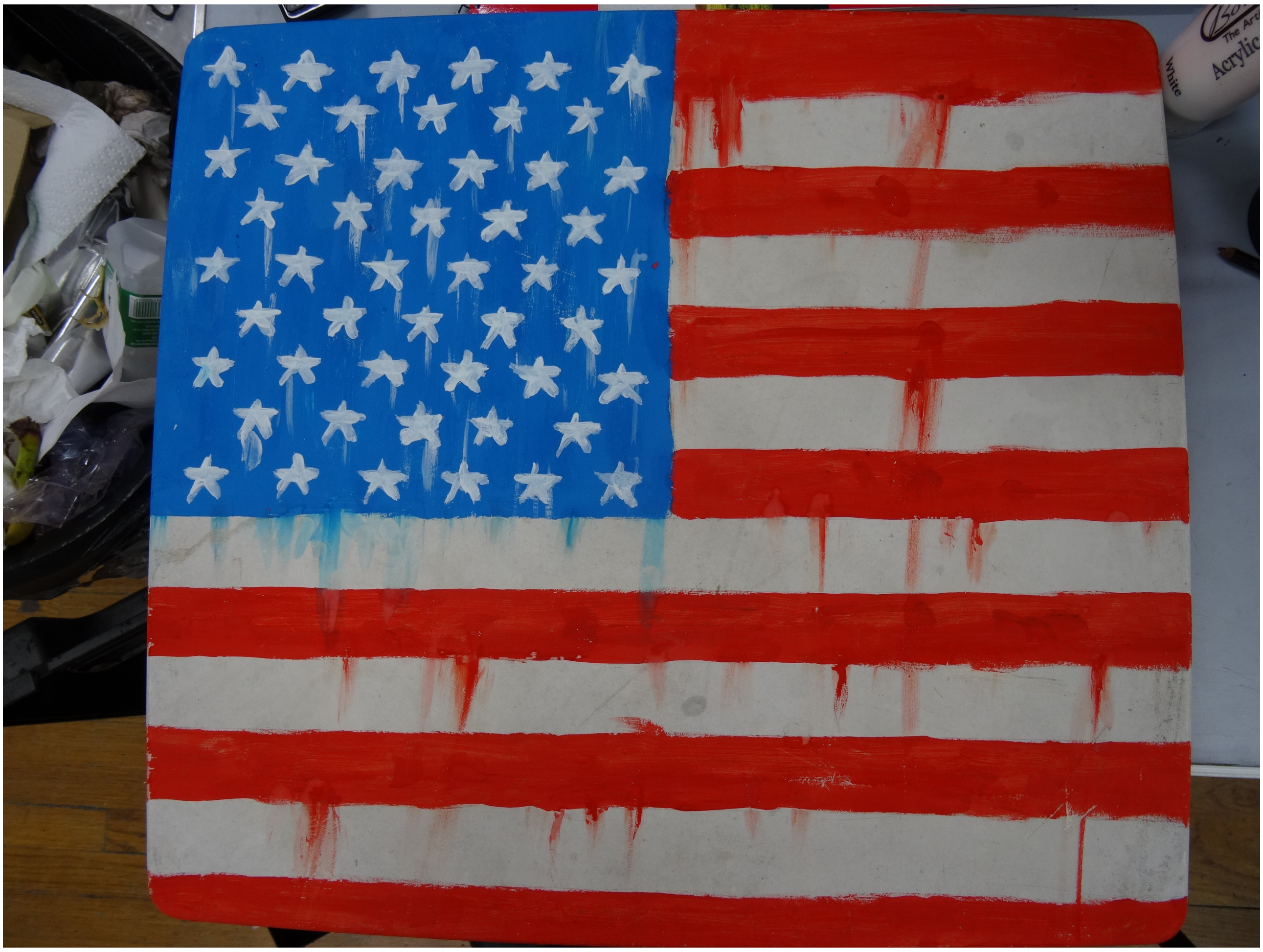
I've always had a deep fascination for flags. Something about their symbolism, and the great and eternal meanings invested in a few stripes of colour, or simple shapes, has continually appealed to me on a very deep level. They are universal, speaking through ages, inspiring successive generations, nations and individuals alike. The first true modern flag, the French tricolour – three basic bands of primary colour – still continues to fuel hopes, desires and dreams of liberty, change and humanity the world over three centuries later.

For final physical presentation of the main work, I chose to paint a rough and drippy Stars & Stripes (itself a highly influential design) on a coffee table, which would separate the two street-level characters – Sherry on one side, Missy on the other. The current political situation has created an America so divided that it's almost difficult, for outsiders in the UK, to fully comprehend or contextualise. Vast swathes of people stage very public protests, yet the majority of the nation voted for the object of those protests. Despite his elitist background, Trump has not divided rich/poor, black/white, male/female, north/south – members of the same ethnic and social class stand on opposite sides of the political *wall* which has now been built.









The idea of using the coffee table as the object of division – in reality a white plastic artefact of the sort usually used in gardens during warm weather – helped to visualise the final presentation. Missy's interview informs us she views the Southern flag over the Stars & Stripes, hinting at the time when Texas was an independent state in the 19th Century. That's why the Stars & Stripes will be placed on Sherry's side – Missy already has a flag, on her side, and the very emblem of nationhood is itself divisory.

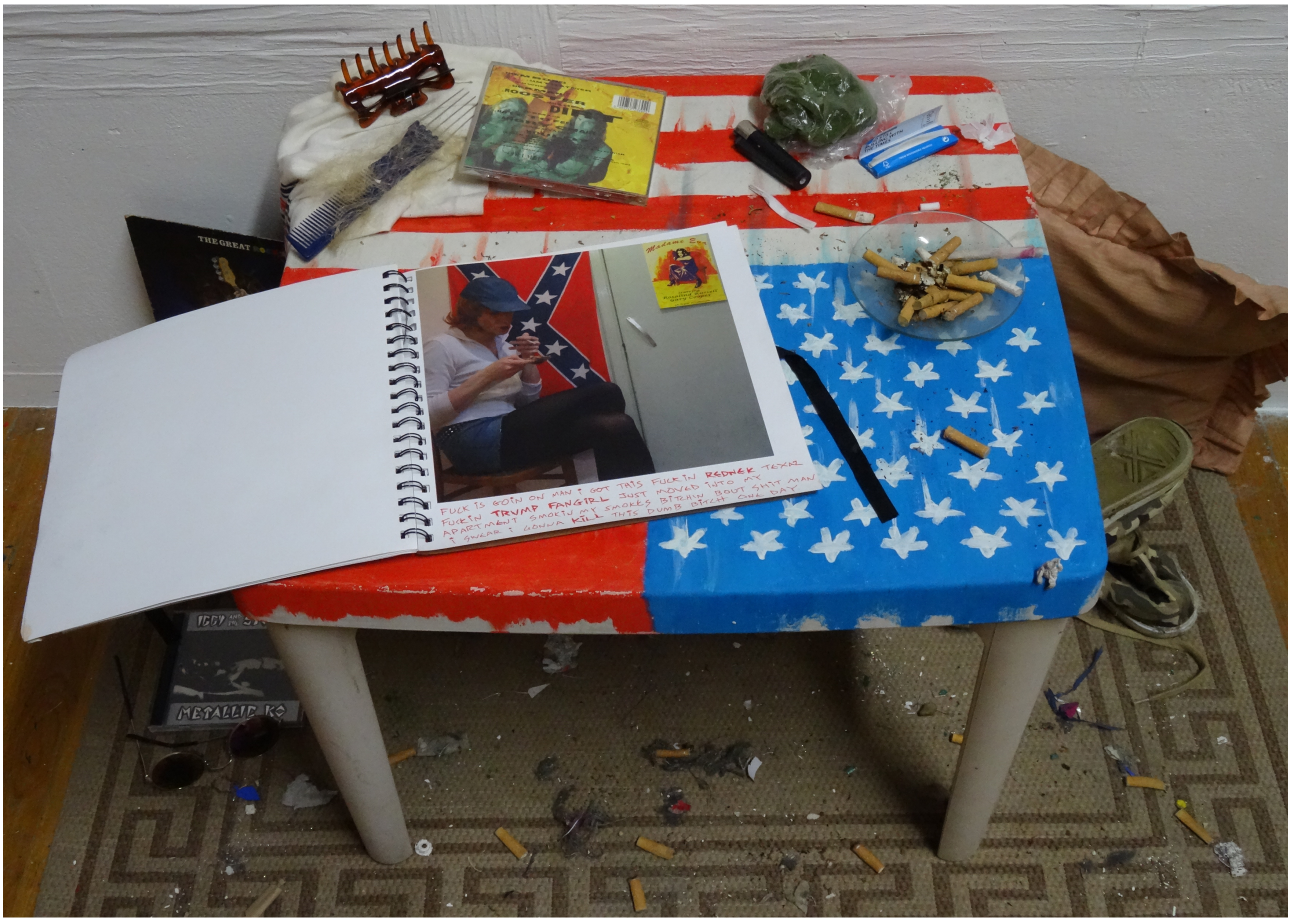
The use of a mundane domestic object suggests that these divisions may even run within a single family – as occurs with any civil war, as it's my belief that America is seeing a tacit inner conflict now (echoed in the '60s by Iggy Pop: “Well it's 1969 okay/We got a war across the USA”). It's the scope of this schizophrenia which feeds into the portraiture and the images presented around the object: herein the artist himself conveys the pseudo-reality of schizoid personalities, by portraying characters on both sides of the political wall and justifying each on their own terms (almost Orwellian *doublethink* in pictorial form?). Missy's blind stubbornness may be as undefined and hazy as Sherry's angry protest, but both are fervently committed to their views nonetheless, and never the twain shall meet, for the little plastic table may as well be a brick wall.

Personally, I pay no attention whatever to official media outlets – what opinion and update I gather is either from grass roots blogs and posts from ordinary citizens, or occasionally material from the likes of Noam Chomsky, Norman Finkelstein or Amy Goodman (of *Democracy Now!)* on Youtube and other radical sites. After all, it's not reporters and agenda-led media channels, but ordinary people, who have to live, and deal, with the new administration and its policies: people like Missy and Sherry.

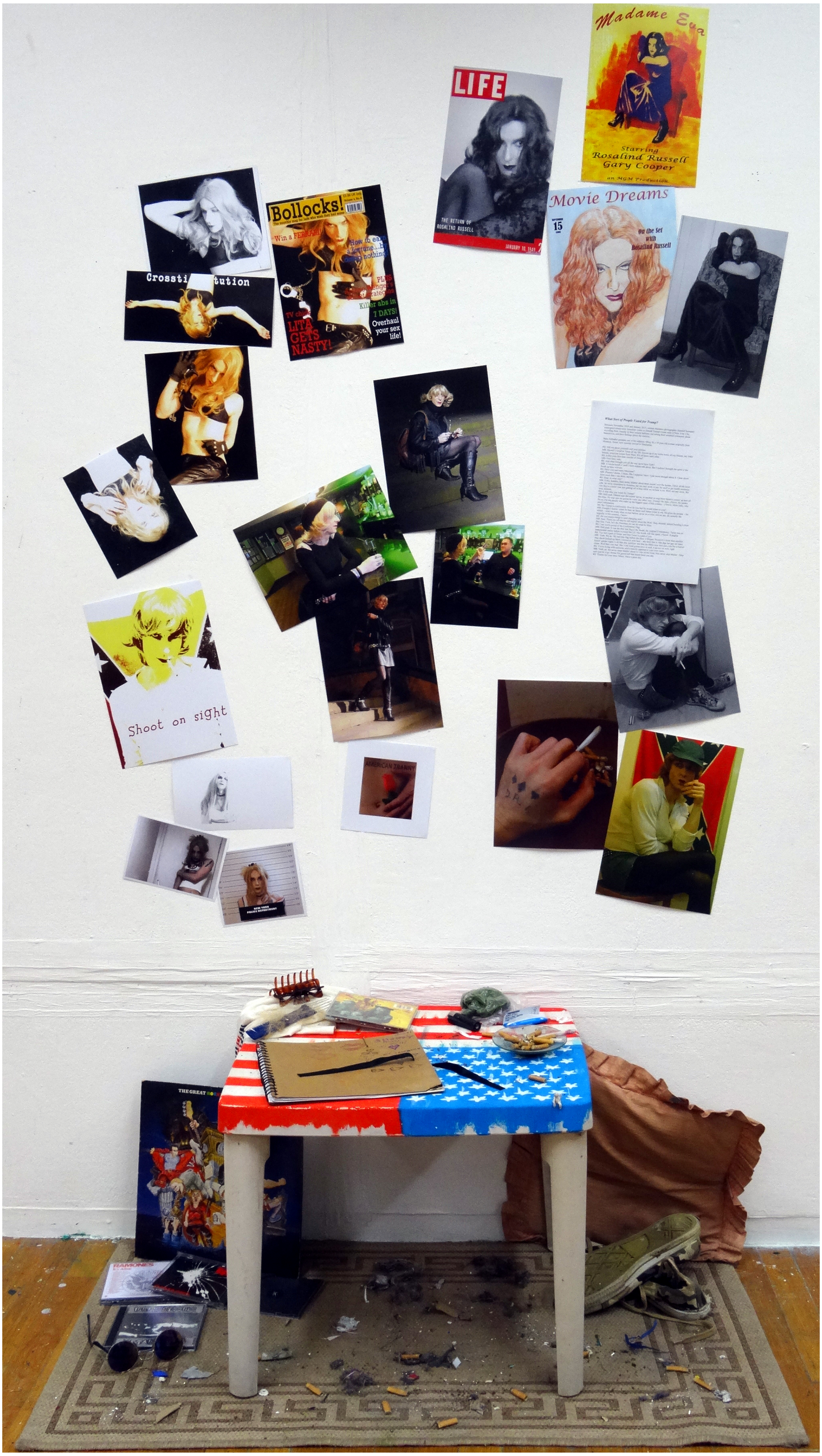
The table was designed to be as grungy as possible – luckily it was pretty grot to start with, so I was able to capitalise on that. The main context: Emin's *My Bed*, a thing so *used*, so evidently stained and abused, that the viewer may even wish to give it a wide berth.

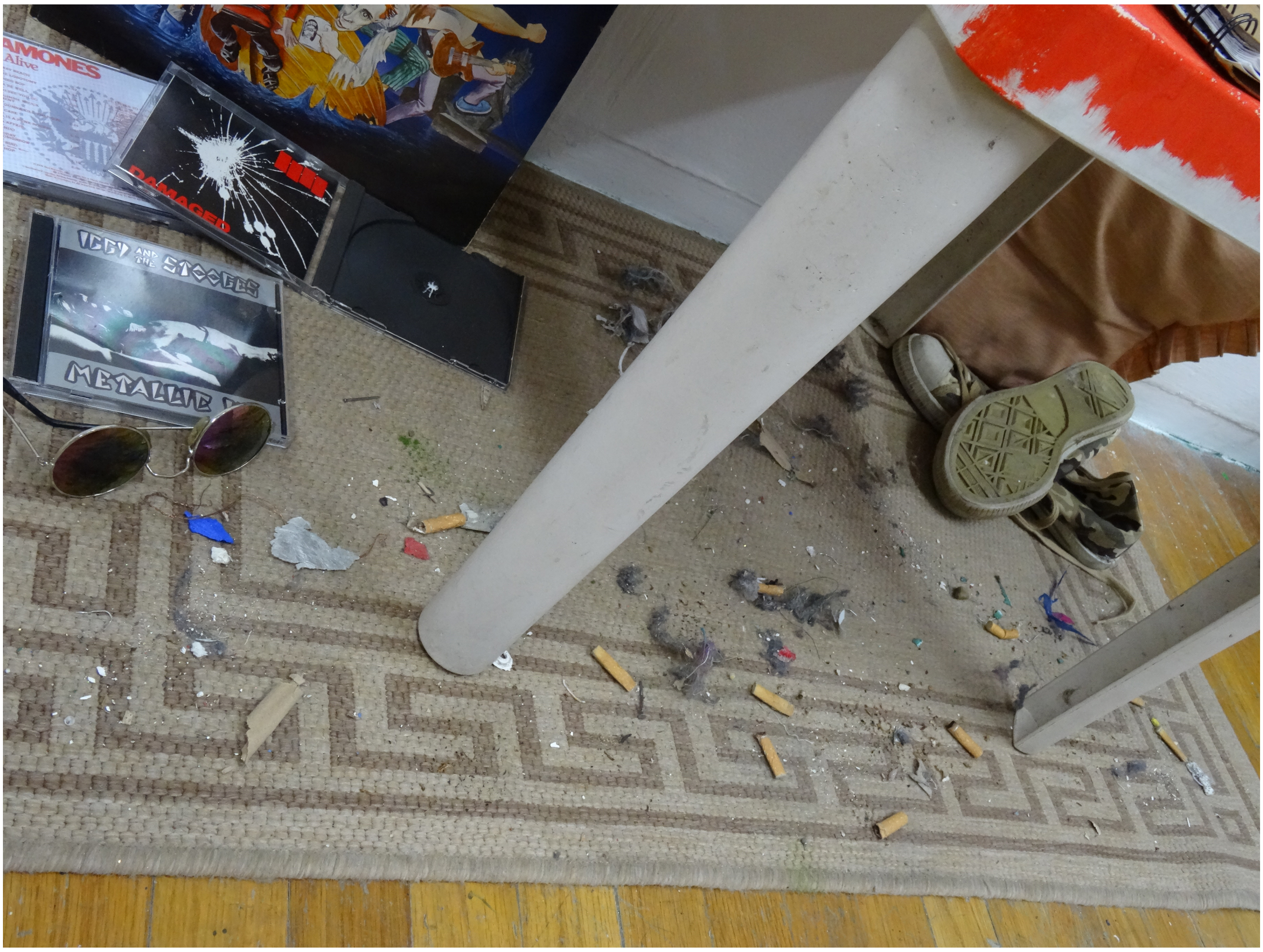
I swept the floor of the studio several times to gather fluff balls and detritus to add to the floor display. The cigarette ends were held back until the final day, as I wanted the stale smells to be as strong as possible, after several weeks of having been wrapped up in a plastic bag.

I decided not to place the table on its end eventually, as I wanted Sherri's (s)crapbook to be easily available to read by the public. The dichotomy between anti-Trump Sherry and pro Missy was made evident by the placement of their respective photo sets on either side of the table/flag, with their own personal belongings beneath (Missy's cigarette ends and sneakers, Sherri's tank top, hair accessories and CDs). The rest of the junk is a gutter-level base above which, at its highest level, sits the memorabilia pertaining to Rosalind in her Hollywood stardom days – unreachable both through time and space, a star from the days when the studios rigorously controlled the release of media relating to their celebrities and dictated the image they wanted the star to present.



FUCK IS GOIN ON MAN I GOT THIS FUCKIN REDNEK TEXAZ
FUCKIN TRUMP FANGIRL JUST MOVED INTO MY
APARTMENT SMOKIN MY SMOKES BITCHIN BOUT SHIT MAN
I SWEAR I GONNA KILL THIS DUMB BITCH ONE DAY


Madame Eva
Starring
Rosalind Russell
Gary Cooper
an MGM Production
LIFE
THE RETURN OF
ROSALIND RUSSELL
JANUARY 15, 1941
Movie Dreams
15
On the Set
with
Rosalind Russell
Bollocks!
Win a FERRARI
TV chick
LITA GETS NASTY!
Killer abs in
7 DAYS!
Overhaul
your sex
life!
Crossti tution
Shoot on sight
AMERICAN TRAMMY
NEW YORK
POLICE DEPARTMENT
THE GREAT
RAMONES


AMONES
Alive
DAMAGED
IGGY AND THE STOOGES
METALLIC

“The mirror itself is the instrument of a universal magic that changes things into a spectacle, spectacles into things, myself into another and another into myself.” (Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*, 1961).